

The LINGENFELTER LETTER



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AMERICANS LIVE SICKER, DIE YOUNGER THAN PEERS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

America is one of the richest countries in the world, but we are less healthy and die earlier than people in other comparable countries. We have poorer health and shorter lives than our peers in 16 other affluent countries, according to a study conducted by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. Despite the United States spending considerably more on health care, we rank at or near the bottom of the following nine indicators:

1. Adverse birth outcomes
2. Injuries and homicides
3. Teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections
4. HIV and AIDs
5. Drug related mortality
6. Obesity and diabetes
7. Heart disease
8. Chronic lung disease
9. Disability

Behavior, rather than our health care system, has the greatest impact on U.S. health care costs. Even highly advantaged Americans—with health insurance, a college education, a higher income bracket and healthy behaviors—have worse health than our international peers. The prevalence of obesity is highest in the U.S., compared to other countries studied. For example, more than one third of all Americans are obese compared to 15.4% in Canada and 3.4% in Japan. Obesity is linked to greater risks of death

from heart disease, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure and the most prevalent cancers, and treatment outcomes are worse for obese patients. The U.S. also has the highest level of cigarette consumption per capita compared to all other developed countries—spanning five decades and ending in the mid-1980s. Americans are more likely to be current or former smokers than Western Europeans. According to the World Health Organization, the current reduction in tobacco smoking is an inadequate predictor of the accumulated risk from smoking since the adverse effects may occur long after one quits. The average lag time for developing diseases from smoking is 25 to 30 years. Because of unhealthy lifestyles, Americans require more treatment for serious conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, as well as other illnesses. This means that it is essential for employers to create a culture of wellness among employees, which empowers the direct and active engagement of improved health, health care and health care security. The result will be greater productivity by employees, a greater chance for profitability, and creation of additional business value.

Source: Steven Woolf and Laudan Aron, Editors; *U.S. Health in International Perspective: Shorter Lives, Poorer Health*; National Academies Press; 2013.

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